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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3716  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0445  
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RUEAHLG/HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0645

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000630

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/FO, NEA/FO/ELA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IOM BAGHDAD'S UNCLEARED VISIT JEOPARDIZES EXPANDED  
RESETTLEMENT OPS IN SYRIA

REF: A. SEPTEMBER 2-3 POUNDS-HARRIS EMAIL EXCHANGE  
[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 496

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Maura Connelly per 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request, see para 8.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: During a discussion on the possibility of allowing IOM Damascus to host a trainer from outside Syria, Husam Alaa, Syrian MFA Chief of Staff for D/FM Faisal Miqdad, informed Charge September 3 that two IOM officials had entered Syria and participated in a meeting in Damascus with the Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) without knowledge of or permission from the Syrian government. In light of the SARG's well-known sensitivities to IOM operations, this protocol breach could jeopardize USG plans to expand Iraqi resettlement operations in Syria. End Summary.

[1](#)3. (C) In response to a question by Charge regarding the SARG's willingness to consider granting permission for an IOM trainer to visit Damascus in the near future (ref A), Alaa said the SARG had developed a positive working relationship with IOM management in Damascus over the last 12 months and that confidence in IOM's credibility had grown. However, the unauthorized presence of IOM personnel in Syria had again raised concerns within the SARG about IOM's operations here. Alaa said he had personally demarched IOM in Damascus and the Syrian Ambassador in Geneva was under instructions to raise the issue with IOM there.

[1](#)4. (C) Alaa acknowledged the SARG had agreed to consider such requests on a case-by-case basis, as part of a larger agreement to allow the USG to expand its Iraqi resettlement operations in Syria (Ref B). The SARG, Alaa continued, would honor its commitment if it received a formal note from IOM. However, the SARG first was demanding from IOM explanation why IOM employees from outside Syria had entered the country without proper clearance.

[1](#)5. (C) Pol/Econ Chief followed up September 4 with Damascus IOM Chief Maria Rummon (strictly protect). Rummon explained that IOM Baghdad COM Rafiq Tschannan had informed her late last week that the Iraqi Minister of Displacement and Migration wanted to travel to Damascus on August 30 for meetings with IOM and UNHCR on facilitating the return of Iraqi refugees to Iraq. Tschannan asked Rummon to send an IOM car to pick up the minister at the airport, and informed her he would be accompanying the minister. (Note: According to Rummon, IOM Baghdad is providing capacity building

services to the Ministry.)

¶6. (C) Rummon replied that the Iraqi Embassy was the proper address to take care of the Minister, and that it was too late to receive MFA permission for Tschannan's participation.

Tschannan said he understood and would not travel, but then contacted Rummon the next day (August 29, a holiday) to say he would be coming via land-route through Amman at the request of the minister. According to Rummon, Tschannan, a Swiss national, entered Syria on a tourist passport, traveling in an IOM car. He and the Iraqi minister participated in a meeting at IOM headquarters in Damascus along with UNCHR reps from Amman and Damascus. The two men departed together via an IOM vehicle en route to Amman after the meeting, Rummon reported.

¶7. (C) According to Rummon and UNHCR rep Laurens Jolles, the focus of the discussions was facilitating the return of Iraqi refugees. The Minister sought IOM and UNCHR assistance in Syria to transport refugees. IOM made no commitments to do so, said Rummon. UNHCR told us that it will set up a registration desk at its Duma facility to register and arrange assistance for voluntary return cases. According to the Iraqi Embassy, the Minister held no meetings with Syrian officials.

¶8. (C) Action request: Request PRM consider making a approach to IOM Geneva at the appropriate level to clarify the SARG's sensitivities regarding IOM operations in Damascus and register our concern that IOM Baghdad's unauthorized presence in Syria jeopardizes ongoing Iraqi resettlement operations and our plans to expand them in the coming fiscal

year. PRM may also want to consider whether to approach the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration on how best to deconflict its efforts to promote refugee returns with our own Iraqi refugee resettlement program.

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